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ABSTRACT

This booklet explains how service learning can be used to encourage out-of-school youth to return to an education program. The booklet begins with a discussion of the term "out-of-school youth" that includes the early warning signals indicating a potential for dropping out of school and circumstances and characteristics of potential school dropouts. After an exploration of the school-related, family-related, job-related, and other reasons why traditional school has failed out-of-school youth, selected practices from the area of education reform that have bearing on dropout prevention and retrieval are examined. Special attention is paid to the theory of multiple intelligences and the literature on community service learning and the school-to-work transition. The results of implementing service learning are reviewed. The following types of programs that have been successful at recapturing students are detailed: full-service community schools, adult learning centers, communities in schools, and AmeriCorps. Presented next are suggestions for service learning program planners regarding the following areas: school infrastructures, partnerships and connections, teacher training, and high-quality service learning. Concluding the booklet are descriptions and the addresses of five national organizations involved in dropout prevention. (Contains 24 references.) (MN)

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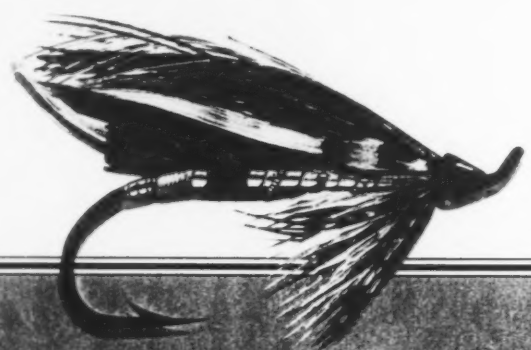
LINKING LEARNING WITH LIFE

Hooking Out-Of-School Youth Through Service Learning



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Hooking Out-of-School Youth Through Service Learning

by Kathryn Gibson Carter

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Preface

Prior to joining the South Carolina Department of Education as the coordinator of Learn and Serve America, I was the director of a model dropout prevention and retrieval center for a local school district. This center had a number of programs designed to keep youth in school including Communities in Schools, an adult learning center for youth age 17 or older who could only go to school 20 hours a week, a parenting program, a child care center for infants six weeks through four years of age, a computer center, an after-school program, and a make-up center for students who missed too many days from school.

In spite of all these conveniences and services, it was apparent to me as an administrator that what happened in the classroom played a major role in whether we were able to retain these students and successfully help them complete their education. The center began to explore experiential learning strategies designed to actively engage young people in their learning process. The teachers began to change their role from one of "being in charge" to a coach or facilitator of learning. Students began to assume more responsibility for their learning, and the school became the center of the community.

Quite by accident, the school got involved in service learning, first through a series of community service projects such as Adopt-a-Highway and raising food and other supplies for the needy. Gradually, the community service transformed into service learning. Students began to plan projects based on needs assessments. Peer tutoring and mentoring programs became commonplace.

After years of working in the field, I am convinced that service learning is one of the most powerful instructional strategies I have ever witnessed. The dynamics of the classroom are changing. No longer is the "smart" child the only one who has the answers. Those young people who were previously reluctant to offer any information or opinion are now fully participating. Service learning is allowing students who do not do well as measured by traditional instruments to succeed. The old saying, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn," definitely applies to service learning. Service learning is truly "linking learning with life."

Kathryn Gibson Carter, Ed.D.
South Carolina Department of Education

Who Are Out-of-School Youth?

Out-of-school youth are defined as young people ages 16 through 26 who are not formally enrolled in an elementary, secondary, or institution of higher education and have not completed their education (National & Community Service Act, 1993). This publication will focus primarily on these young people who are eligible to attend public schools, have made the decision to leave the traditional K-12 setting before graduating, and have enrolled in some type of alternative educational program.

Many students who have chosen to leave the traditional classroom can be identified as at risk of dropping out of school years before taking that step by looking at certain early warning signs.

Early warning signals indicating a potential for dropping out of school

- Absenteeism/truancy/frequent tardiness
- Poor grades
- Discrepancy between ability and performance
- Reading level not commensurate with grade level
- Difficulty learning math skills
- Verbal deficiency
- Inability to tolerate structured activities
- Lack of basic skills
- Lack of definitive educational goals
- Feeling of alienation from school
- Belief that school doesn't care
- Failure to see the relevance of education to life experience
- Limited extracurricular involvement
- Two or more years older than peers
- Frequent change of school
- Retention in one or more grades
- Disruptive classroom behavior

Source: *American Association of School Administrators, 1989*

In addition, students in particular circumstances or with certain characteristics have a stronger potential for dropping out.

Circumstances and characteristics of potential school dropouts

- Age– Student is two or more years older than his or her classmates.
- Grade Level– Student is one or more years behind in grade level.
- Academic Aptitude– Student has an I.Q. of 90 or below.
- Grades– Student has made D's or F's in two or more subjects in the current or previous year.
- Interest in Schoolwork– Student shows little interest in schoolwork. Examples: does not do homework, says he or she does not like school, does not respond in class.
- Ability to Read– Student is two or more years below reading level.
- Parental Attitude Toward Graduation– Parent(s) do not care whether student finishes school.
- General Adjustment to School– Student has a negative feeling toward school—indicates he or she has few or no friends, believes teachers are not fair.
- Participation in Out-Of-School Activities– Student does not belong to organizations such as Boy Scouts, 4-H, church groups.
- School Attendance– Student has record of chronic absenteeism—is absent 20 or more days per year from school.
- Acceptance by Other Students– Student perceives that he or she is not liked by other students and has no personal friends.
- Mother's Educational Level– Mother dropped out of school at grade 8 or earlier.
- Father's Educational Level– Father dropped out of school at grade 8 or earlier.
- Health–Student is often absent due to ill health or tires easily in school.

Source: American Association of School Administrators, 1989

Why Has the Traditional School Failed Them?

Young people have access to teachers who are better educated than at any other point in history. Yet for all this progress, dropout rates are reported anywhere from 25% to 35% across the country. Schools are plagued by social and economic trends beyond their control. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1994), increasing numbers of young people:

- live in families that are in a state of deterioration
- live in homes where families never existed
- live in neighborhoods which are places of menace and violence
- start school unready to meet the challenges of learning
- arrive at school hungry, unwashed, and frightened
- are subject to drug and alcohol use, random violence, adolescent pregnancy, and AIDS

In addition to the these factors, the reasons for leaving school reported by dropouts are more often school-related rather than job-related or family-related concerns. Students who left school between the tenth and twelfth grades were just as likely to report dropping out because they "did not like school" (43%) as they were "because they were failing school" (39%). Just as many female dropouts as male dropouts said they left because they "could not get along with teachers" (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). The following chart summarizes these results.

School-Related

- Did not like school 43%
- Could not get along with teachers 23%
- Could not get along with students 15%
- Did not feel safe at school 6%
- Felt I didn't belong 24%
- Could not keep up with schoolwork 31%
- Was failing school 39%
- Was suspended from school 15%

Family-Related

- Had to support family 11%
- Wanted to have a family 8%
- Was pregnant 27%
- Became parent 15%
- Got married 12%
- Had to care for family member 12%

Job-Related

- Could not work and go to school at same time 23%
- Found a job 29%

Other

- Friends dropped out 8%
- Drug or alcohol problem 4%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1994

Many noted educators, psychologists, and sociologists have indicated that the school plays a major role in the success or failure of youth. Generally schools are less effective in meeting the needs of students who do not fit the typical pattern. The longitudinal study, *High School and Beyond* (Barro & Kolstad, 1987), points out that many youth do not have a significant relationship with an adult in the school environment, are doing poorly academically, and are not engaged in extracurricular activities.

Students who are not engaged in the learning process usually achieve marginal or failing grades. Poor performance, inability to get along with teachers, and lack of involvement in school activities all contribute to dropping out. Students who lack motivation frequently do not see any connection between the classroom and the real world. School is often perceived as too demanding, too rigid, and too irrelevant. These, coupled with other societal problems, have led to an alarming number of young people dropping out of public schools each year.

The explosion in these numbers has created an urgency for schools to develop more effective instructional strategies to engage young people in the learning process. The Learning Pyramid illustrates the teaching strategies that are most often suggested in curriculum guides along with the advantages for each instructional methodology.

The Learning Pyramid

Source: H. Larry Winecoff, Curriculum Development and Instructional Planning, 1988

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Strategy:	Advantages for Each Teaching Strategy:
Lecture	Delivery of basic information to a large number of recipients
Demonstration	Delivery of information to a large group
Practice/Drill	Reinforcement of basic information
Discussion	Requires students to be active and to think
Situation/Dilemma Analysis	Students must analyze facts and think critically
Inquiry/Discovery	Students experiment using scientific processes
Field Trip	Gives students first hand experience
Information Processing	Requires application of principles
Academic Research/ Information Use	Requires systematic approach to problem identification and evaluation of information
Problem Solving	Utilizes higher order cognitive and academic skills
Dramatization	High level of student participation
Simulation	Allows students to learn from the consequences of their own actions
Synectics*	Encourages students to explore the unfamiliar
Real-Life Action Projects	Removes the barrier between school and community; requires students to use a broad range of cognitive and affective learnings

*synectics—a system of problem-stating and problem-solution based on creative thinking that involves free use of metaphor and analogy in informal interchange within a carefully selected small group of individuals of diverse personality and areas of specialization

(Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1989).

Most concepts require two or more teaching strategies; yet teachers, in an effort to cover the material, often only utilize one approach. However, a strategy which requires higher order or complex processes will likely contain a number of less complex strategies which are understood as part of the process. For example, a real-life action project may utilize both discussion and problem solving prior to the project experience. Educators have long understood that students learn best when they are engaged in the learning process. Unfortunately, research shows that most schools still predominantly utilize lecture, demonstration, drill, or discussion methods. Yet on the average, students exposed to these instructional strategies only retain 10% to 15% while real-life action projects produce an astonishing 95% retention rate and lifelong results.

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What Does Education Reform Suggest?

One of the primary purposes of education reform is to enable at-risk students to succeed. Schools must empower students toward success rather than disable them. Programs which actively engage students will make a significant difference in the lives of a great number of young people who are not successful in our existing education programs (Drew, 1990). Effective dropout prevention and retrieval programs use active learning as a strategy and service learning as a methodology. Education reform incorporates these approaches in several ways.

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner, co-director of Project Zero at Harvard University, describes in *Frames of Mind* (1983) an intelligence as "the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued within one or more cultural settings." Gardner believes that schools almost exclusively focus on linguistic and logical intelligences, and standardized tests sample only portions of these two intelligences. The principal assumption of Gardner's work is that individuals are not all alike in their cognitive potentials and intellectual styles, and education could be better carried out if it were tailored to these differences. Gardner also advocates reflection, a key component of service learning, to assist students in making the connection between the activities in which they are engaged and the kinds of project activities in which they are most likely to become involved following completion of school.

Community Service Learning

Other education reform literature (Boyer, 1987; Comer, 1988; Sizer, 1992) recommends community service learning in school restructuring to help students meet their social and civic obligations and to connect academic learning with real-world experiences. The literature further acknowledges the fact that schools can no longer handle the task

alone. Efforts should be made to utilize the entire community as a classroom. Learning can and does take place outside the four walls of the school building.

School-to-Work Transition

School-to-Work (STW) Transition programs represent another strategy for education reform. One of the major tenets of STW is workplace learning in which students engage in learning in the "real-world community." Through service learning, students can participate in work experiences in the service sector, gaining a variety of job skills and abilities. The entire community—business and industry, human service agencies, community-based organizations—needs to join hands and work together to educate America's youth. An educative community is one in which all formal and informal organizations, agencies, and individuals collaborate in working toward a better community and an acceptable quality of life for all citizens (Kilbourne, Decker & Romney, 1994).

A Framework for School Reform

Service learning provides the framework and process for school restructuring to connect the classroom to the community. Service learning helps students develop the knowledge and skills to become effective, productive, caring young adults, involved in their community and nation. Being involved in this practice enables the student to reinforce the need to learn the basic core curriculum through guided involvement in real-life situations. Service learning fits the description of a real-life action project in the Learning Pyramid and accommodates a variety of different "intelligences."

What Are the Results of Implementing Service Learning?

When service experiences are engaging and meaningful and benefit the larger community; when programs are not simply out-of-class activities that may or may not have an educational value; and when educators ensure that the service opportunities provide worthwhile learning experiences for students; evaluations of such programs show promising results. Evaluation of service learning (Corporation for National Service, 1997) has demonstrated significant positive impacts on civic and educational development. Students involved in this methodology showed significant gains in the following areas:

- engagement in school
- grades
- core-subject grade average (English, math, science, and social studies)
- educational aspirations
- attendance
- motivation

What Types of Programs Are Recapturing Students?

There are many highly successful dropout prevention and retrieval programs across the country that are turning students around. This booklet will explore briefly four very different programs which will show increasing levels of service learning involvement. A common thread is that these programs are not only bridging the learning gap, but they are also providing an environment that values the learner, recognizes the need for students to be able to think in an adult world, and actively engages students in learning academic, social, and workplace skills.

Full-Service Community Schools

Full-service community schools are formed when families, human service agencies, and schools join together to become true learning communities. Schools become more than merely a place where youth go to attend classes from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. Schools become essential sites for a host of activities that meet the needs of the community. For example, these activities might include after-school enrichment or tutorial programs for children; a youth service corps; lifelong learning activities such as family literacy, high school completion and GED, and courses coordinated with two- and four-year colleges for continuing education; enrichment, social, recreational, and cultural activities; and other programs designed by locally established advisory councils (Nielsen & Dunlap, 1992). These activities provide wonderful situations for integrating service learning into the school's curriculum.

Students, parents, social service agency representatives, business people, religious leaders, and other community members can provide important insight into what services can and should be established at these schools. Needs of individual students are addressed by connecting them to a myriad of community services. In this model, the entire community takes responsibility for educating youth. The African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," succinctly describes the philosophy of a full-service community school.

Providing support services for students is not sufficient. The process

of schooling and the approach to teaching must also change to more actively involve youth in the life of the community. Ira Harkavy (1997) illustrated this point in his testimony before Congress when he asked them to consider the impacts "when integrated, educationally-based programs...[allow students] to have their education connected to real-world, problem-solving activities that provide service to other students and community members." By utilizing service learning as an instructional strategy, full-service schools would not only provide support services to students, but would allow these students to also give back to the school and community through service.

The Adult Learning Center

More than one-third of all adults enrolling in adult education programs are between the ages of 16 to 24. Most school districts have provisions which legally allow students to drop out of school at age 16 or 17. Adult learning centers generally operate during the day and evening and offer students an opportunity to choose a time that best suits their schedules. At the same time, students can be employed or tend to small children.

Adult educators long ago recognized that adult students "vote with their feet." If a program is not meeting the student's needs, the student will not return. Successful adult learning labs try to individualize the program to meet the needs of each student. Most programs are competency-based, and students are not required to complete busy work for material already mastered. Rather, students are given an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of subject matter and move to new material.

One promising adult program model, found in South Carolina, is an adult literacy corps which uses adult students who are reading on the sixth grade level or above as tutors for third graders who are reading below grade level. Adult students are trained on how to select appropriate reading material, how to motivate children to read, and how to assist them while reading a book. Adult students are then paired with

elementary students in housing projects or elementary schools. Research clearly demonstrates that the person providing the tutoring usually benefits the most (Supik, 1991; Gaustad, 1992; Giesecke, Cartledge, & Gardner, 1993); therefore, adult students benefit by participating in a service learning activity that improves their own basic skills level. Additionally, this activity addresses the President's goal of every child being able to read on grade level by the third grade. Educators recognize the parent as the child's first teacher. With many of these adult students being parents, another benefit of the corps is the improvement of the adult/parent's reading level. Adults who have an opportunity to assist younger students also grow emotionally as they gain confidence in their academic ability and in their self-esteem by being a person of value in their community.

Communities in Schools

Communities in Schools (CIS) brings together community resources to help youth be successful in school and life. It brings together employment counselors, social workers, educators, and private businesses as a support group for at-risk youth and their families. Their goal is to provide a nurturing atmosphere where students can succeed as they work on social and academic problems which have kept them from succeeding in the past. CIS recognizes that students learn in many different ways, and they make every attempt to meet students halfway, if not all the way, in turning their lives around. The basic principles of CIS are:

- Every child needs and deserves a personal one-on-one relationship with a caring adult.
- Every child needs and deserves a safe place to learn and grow.
- Every child needs and deserves a marketable skill to use upon graduation.
- Every child needs and deserves a chance to give back to peers and the community.

The fourth basic principle, a chance to give back to peers and community, has prompted CIS personnel to offer service learning as an integrated instructional strategy. These service projects have helped to connect CIS students to the community while at the same time strengthening their understanding of the academic skills being taught in the classroom and helping them develop basic marketable skills.

AmeriCorps

The National and Community Service Trust Act provided funds for the creation of a national domestic corps, AmeriCorps, with a mission of "Getting Things Done" to help solve real problems in American communities. This corps is open to all individuals 17 and older who want to devote a year of service to their country. AmeriCorps programs select individuals representing all races, national origins, educational attainments, and socioeconomic backgrounds. AmeriCorps participants tutor children, build low-income houses, restore national parks and coastlines, assist in national disasters, and participate in hundreds of other service projects in the areas of education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs. AmeriCorps recognizes that community service is the very essence of citizenship. Corps members develop a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose which is needed to work in a team and make a difference in the lives of the people they are serving.

It is not unusual for one corps member who has a college degree to serve on the same team with another corps member who has dropped out of school. Corps members without a high school diploma are encouraged to enroll in a General Educational Development (GED) preparation program. The GED test is designed to measure the general knowledge and thinking skills that it takes to earn a high school diploma. A GED graduate must demonstrate higher order thinking skills and problem-solving ability to pass the rigorous battery of tests. Serving as an AmeriCorps member and enrolling in a GED program are wonderful preparations for that test as well as for the test of life.

Suggestions for Program Planners

If school districts are serious about meeting the needs of students who do not fit the traditional pattern, then a number of practices addressed in this guidebook must be embraced. Consider some of the following suggestions.

School Infrastructure

A school infrastructure supporting active learning strategies needs to be in place for service learning implementation.

- Schools must use experiential learning strategies for youth who have been identified as at risk of dropping out. Howard Gardner's research on multiple intelligences (1983) challenges schools to find ways to stimulate each student's intelligences on a regular basis.
- At-risk youth can be motivated, especially when teachers combine real-world application with classroom theory. Administrators and teachers should closely examine instructional strategies such as service learning and school-to-work which connect youth to the outside world.
- A steering committee or advisory council representing students (especially at-risk youth), parents, and community personnel should be established to oversee the project. Parents need to be included in the discussion and encouraged to serve as volunteers.
- Schools need to develop schedules, such as block scheduling, to support the implementation of service learning.
- Few people know where all the services are in a community; everyone knows where the schools are. Collocation of providers fosters communication; duplication of effort is recognized and stopped; and providers and families save time in enrolling clients in services.
- Schools and/or programs, especially those which have recaptured students, should consider establishing a service corps. Corps will help develop a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose. At-risk youth should be recruited for these corps.

Partnerships and Connections

Partnerships and connections to the community need to be established.

- Partnerships need to be established with agencies, institutions, and organizations for possible service sites. Full-service schools strive to bring the needed services into the school. By having these organizations collocated in the school, students could easily assist them in providing their services.
- Service learning need not be offered in a vacuum; rather, it can be connected to other programs such as the America Reads Challenge, character education, or school-to-work.
- Every student must have a meaningful relationship with at least one caring adult in the school environment. As a follow-up to the President's Summit on Volunteerism, communities across the country are developing strategies for matching youth with caring adults. Working with teachers and community leaders in a service learning setting provides a natural situation for these meaningful relationships. In addition, older students could also be paired with younger students.
- AmeriCorps or VISTA volunteers can be recruited to serve as point persons in the schools for coordinating and building capacity for service learning. The Corporation for National Service actively encourages collaboration among different groups of CNS-funded service providers.
- Young people who are not ready for postsecondary training should be encouraged to participate in one of the many AmeriCorps programs around the country. Local AmeriCorps programs often sponsor a "day of service" which would allow these young people an opportunity to become familiar with the organization.

Teacher Training

Teachers and other adult leaders need ongoing professional development in service learning.

- Teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals need in-service training on how to implement service learning as an instructional strategy. Service learning is a complex strategy that is not likely to be mastered on the first attempt. Therefore, on-going training activities are needed for staff to improve techniques.

- Teachers need release time to explore ways to infuse service learning into the curriculum frameworks. Research demonstrates that the most powerful way to offer service learning is to integrate a variety of service experiences across the entire academic curriculum.

- Schools need to develop a library of service learning materials, e.g., videos, curriculum ideas, and service contracts, whether with students or with outside agencies. The National Service Learning Clearinghouse could guide a school through this process.

- Schools need to partner with institutions of higher education to develop teacher recertification or graduate level methodology courses on service learning. Departments of Education should work closely with teacher education institutions to include service learning as a part of the teacher training program.

High Quality Service Learning

Strive continually to achieve the highest standards of service learning implementation.

- Students must be well-trained prior to being placed in any service project. Preparation, including research and newly acquired skills, lays the groundwork for the experience and helps to focus and prepare the student for the experience.

- Service projects must be engaging, meaningful, and meet real needs. By performing meaningful service, students can develop and apply new skills, reinforcing connections between the classroom and the real world.

- Students need to be involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of service projects. Youth often lack a legitimate role in the communities in which they live. Service learning allows them an opportunity to plan and participate to improve their communities.

- And finally, students need to be recognized for their accomplishments. Since 42% of families never participate in any type of volunteer activity, it is not natural for many students to volunteer their time and talents. Students need to know they are making a difference in the lives of others.

Conclusion

Service learning is a powerful instructional strategy which has been extremely effective in turning students around. Service learning can also answer the calls of leading education reformers for more personalized teaching with active learning strategies. Service learning connects young people to the community by placing them in challenging situations where they can strengthen their academic curriculum. It also makes the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom relevant, as young people connect their actions to the world beyond the four walls of the classroom.

Dropout prevention and retrieval programs can successfully help young people receive their high school credentials when schools consider utilizing experiential learning approaches such as service learning. Research into the practice of service learning indicates that a well-designed program can have a powerful impact in the way teachers teach and students learn. Service learning provides an integrated and vital approach for educating young people across this country.

Next Steps

Investigate the dropout prevention programs in your area. These must be designed locally to meet the needs of your students. Learn more about ways to connect your school with the community. Become more knowledgeable about service learning. These excellent resource organizations can guide you.

National Dropout Prevention Center

The National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University has a wealth of information related to dropout prevention and retrieval of dropouts as well as service learning resources.

National Dropout Prevention Center
Clemson University
205 Martin Street
Clemson, SC 29634-0726
(864) 656-2599
email: ndpc@clemson.edu
www.dropoutprevention.org

Communities in Schools

Communities in Schools is a nationally recognized dropout prevention program that is making a significant difference in communities throughout the country. Their mission is to bring resources together to help youth become successful.

Communities in Schools
1199 North Fairfax Street
Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 519-8999
email: cis@cisnet.org
www.cisnet.org

National Community Education Association

Community education is a process that brings local citizens, agencies, and institutions together as active partners to identify and link community needs and resources in addressing education and community concerns. One national organization, the National Community Education Association, promotes this concept by bringing all the stakeholders together.

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401
(703) 359-8973
email: ncea@ncea.com
www.idsonline.com/ncea

Corporation for National Service

The National and Community Service Trust Act established the Corporation for National Service (CNS) in 1993. CNS administers funds to states to establish both AmeriCorps programs and Learn and Serve America programs.

AmeriCorps programs recruit individuals of all ages who want to devote a year to service. In exchange for their year of service, AmeriCorps members earn a small living allowance and an award for higher education or vocational training.

Learn and Serve America funds are available to state education agencies and state commissions to provide funding to local education agencies and community-based organizations for service learning related activities. Learn and Serve America also funds institutions of higher education.

CNS also provides a variety of trainings as well as technical assistance nationwide.

Corporation for National Service
1201 New York Avenue
NW, Washington, DC 20525
Learn and Serve America (202) 606-5000
AmeriCorps 1-800-942-2677
www.cns.gov

National Service Learning Clearinghouse

To enhance your understanding of service learning as an instructional methodology, your next step should be to contact the National Service Learning Clearinghouse. This center, which is funded by the Corporation for National Service, provides numerous materials and resources for persons interested in implementing service learning. The center also provides referrals including model programs and trained personnel in each state.

National Service Learning Clearinghouse
University of Minnesota
Vocational & Technical Education Building
1954 Buford Avenue, R-460, St. Paul, MN 55108
1-800-808-SERV (7378)
www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu

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